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PP RUEHWEB

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P 191244Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8089
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 5855
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0496
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 2762
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1123
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4550
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1293
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0173
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0188
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0577
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000355

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STATE FOR AF/PD - ROBERT DANCE
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SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER FIRES LATEST SALVO IN GSE ANTI-USG
RHETORIC

Classified by AMB Scott H. DeLisi. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY. THE UNITED STATES IS "DEMONIZING" PRESIDENT ISAIAS AFWERKI AND TRYING TO DESTABILIZE ERITREA, THE ERITREAN MINISTER FOR INFORMATION ALI ABDU TOLD THE ACTING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER DURING RARE MEETING WITH AN AMERICAN OFFICIAL. THE MINISTER RULED OUT COOPERATION ON ANY PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORTS WITH THE UNITED STATES FROM HIS MINISTRY OR THE ERITREAN GOVERNMENT DUE TO THE USG'S HOSTILITY TOWARDS ERITREA AND PAST INTERFERENCE IN ERITREA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. ALI ABDU DECLINED TO OFFER ANY EXAMPLES OF USG "DEMONIZATION" OF THE PRESIDENT OR OF OUR "DESTABILIZATION" EFFORTS AND HE CONVEYED THE SENSE THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE HIS OWN RHETORIC. NONETHELESS, THE MESSAGE WAS CLEAR AND WE CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT HE HAD AGREED TO THIS MEETING IN ORDER TO CONVEY IT - IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH THE RECENT ESCALATION IN GSE ATTACKS ON THE USG. TORN BETWEEN DESIRE FOR A BROADER USG ROLE IN RESOLVING THE BORDER DISPUTE BUT FEARFUL THAT USG ENGAGEMENT MIGHT SOMEHOW REWRITE THE EEBC DECISION IN ETHIOPIA'S FAVOR, THE GSE SEEMS INTENT ON DOING SOME PRE-EMPTIVE DEMONIZATION OF ITS OWN - A COURSE THAT IS MADE ALL THE EASIER GIVEN THAT IT CONFORMS WITH THE VIEWS HELD BY MANY, ALTHOUGH NOT ALL, IN THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY

12. (C) MINISTER OF INFORMATION ALI ABDU USED A MEETING WITH EMBASSY ASMARA'S ACTING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER TO ACCUSE THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT (USG) OF DEMONIZING PRESIDENT ISAIAS AFWERKI, WORKING TO DESTABILIZE THEIR COUNTRY, AND SIDING WITH ETHIOPIA IN THE PRESENT BORDER DISPUTE. WHEN PRESSED BY A/PAO FOR SPECIFICS ON HOW THE UNITED STATES HAD ENGAGED IN THESE ACTIVITIES, THE MINISTER SAID HE WOULD NOT ELABORATE OR CITE EXAMPLES.

13. (C) ALI ABDU SAID THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD NOT LEARNED ITS LESSON IN ERITREA AND HAS ALWAYS WORKED AGAINST HIS COUNTRY. HE CITED THE USG'S LACK OF SUPPORT FOR THEIR LEGITIMATE REBELLION AGAINST ETHIOPIA (COMMON THEME HERE) AND STATED THAT WE CONTINUE TO PROP UP A "CORRUPT AND ILLEGITIMATE REGIME" IN ADDIS. THE MINISTER DISMISSED THE NEED FOR EEBC MEETINGS IN LONDON OR FOR MEETINGS OF THE WITNESSES TO THE ALGIERS ACCORDS, SAYING, "THIS ISSUE CAN BE RESOLVED HERE AND THE BORDER DEMARCATED IN THREE WEEKS."

14. (C) BECAUSE OF WHAT HE CALLED A HISTORY OF THE USG WORKING AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF ERITREA (GOE) AND A TRACK RECORD OF USING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY INITIATIVES TO SPREAD LIES AND PROPAGANDA AGAINST HIS COUNTRY HE RULED OUT ANY COOPERATION FROM HIS MINISTRY ON ANY PUBLIC DIPLOMACY PROGRAMS. WHEN ASKED WHETHER HE BELIEVED COOPERATION COULD BE ACHIEVED ON CULTURAL EXCHANGES, HE SAID THAT YOU COULD NOT "DEAL WITH THE FINGER AND IGNORE WHAT'S BEING DONE TO THE REST OF THE BODY."

15. (C) STRIKINGLY, HOWEVER, THE MINISTER'S DEMEANOR BELIED THE FORCE OF HIS RHETORIC. SEEMINGLY UNCONVINCED OF HIS OWN ARGUMENTS, HIS CHARGES LACKED VIGOR AND HE WAS CLEARLY UNCOMFORTABLE WHEN PRESSED FOR SPECIFICS OR JUSTIFICATIONS FOR HIS STATEMENTS. IN FACT, THE TONE OF THE MEETING WAS SURPRISINGLY FRIENDLY DESPITE THE RHETORIC AND, AFTER ACCEPTING A BOOK ON AMERICAN IMPRESSIONIST ART, HE SAID HE HOPED THE TWO COUNTRIES COULD WORK TOGETHER SOMEDAY.

16. (C) COMMENT: THE MINISTER HAS DECLINED ALL ATTEMPTS BY EMBASSY OFFICERS, INCLUDING THE AMBASSADOR, TO MEET WITH HIM OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. OTHER WESTERN MISSIONS HAVE HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES. FOR HIM TO AGREE TO A MEETING NOW, AT A TIME WHEN THE GSE'S ANTI-USG RHETORIC HAS INTENSIFIED, IS NOT, IN OUR OPINION, COINCIDENTAL. INSTEAD, IT APPEARS INTENDED TO SPECIFICALLY EMPHASIZE THE GSE'S ANTI-USG MESSAGE. HOWEVER, FOR THE GSE TO HIGHLIGHT A THEME EMPHASIZING RESENTMENT AND HOSTILITY AT A TIME WHEN THE UGS IS ACTIVELY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY ENGAGED ON THE GSE'S KEY ISSUE - THE UNDEMARCATED BORDER WITH ETHIOPIA -- SEEMS A FOOLISH STRATEGY AT BEST. IN THIS WE SEE ONE OF THE GSE'S FUNDAMENTAL DILEMMAS; IT SEEMS TORN BETWEEN ITS DESIRE FOR A BROADER USG ROLE IN RESOLVING THE BORDER DISPUTE ON THE ONE HAND AND FEARFUL OF WHERE THAT USG ENGAGEMENT WILL LEAD ON THE OTHER. WORRIED THAT THE USG IS SOMEHOW INTENDING TO EFFECT A PRO-ETHIOPIAN REVISION TO THE EEBC RULING, THE GSE SEEMS INTENT ON DOING SOME PRE-EMPTIVE DEMONIZATION OF ITS OWN. ALTHOUGH THE GSE'S APPROACH IS SHORT-SIGHTED AND ITS FEARS MISPLACED, THIS APPROACH IS NOT SURPRISING -- ESPECIALLY GIVEN THAT THE ANTI-US RHETORIC SO FREELY DISPENSED IN RECENT WEEKS CONFORMS WITH THE VIEWS HELD BY MANY, ALTHOUGH NOT ALL, IN THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP. END COMMENT.

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